



## City/County Council Joint Meeting

May 1, 2017

### Vancouver Community Library

The Clark County Council and the Vancouver City Council met to presentations from Andy Silver, Executive Director of Council for the Homeless, Peggy Sheehan, City of Vancouver Community Development Programs Manager, and Vanessa Gaston, Clark County Community Services Director, who each provided the councils with an overview of their respective program's role in providing homeless services. The councilors and councilmembers discussed opportunities for the two jurisdictions to work collaboratively to better assist homeless populations in the community.

The joint meeting was facilitated by Anne Presentin, Senior Associate for Enviroissues. After the presentations, Ms. Presentin asked each council member to respond to the following questions:

**Thinking about the context surrounding homelessness and your role as a policy and decision-maker, what are 3 observations about the programs already underway?**

**Where do you see possibilities for collaboration between the City and County?**

#### **Councilmember Ty Stober**

- As a community, we are in a great position to move forward, given the experience and programs of the agencies already addressing this issue; there is no need to create new organizations but rather think about how to better utilize what we already have.
- How can we attract people from outside the county and take advantage of new resources
- The City's Affordable Housing Fund (AHF) has a flexible plan that can allow for creativity.
- The AHF funds should be focused on services within the city; however, if an opportunity arises for shelters outside the city limits, there may be an opportunity to swap shelter funding between the city and county

- Homelessness is not something that stops at jurisdictional boundaries. It is present countywide, and as such, a regional approach to the Affordable Housing Fund needs to be considered.

### **Councilor John Blom**

- Homelessness is a county-wide and regional problem, and it is not just a matter of people sleeping on the streets; there are wider social service gaps and needs that underlie much of the problem.
- Build on the current system using mental health, supported employment and long-term services for the long-term solution

### **Councilmember Alishia Topper**

- It is encouraging the City and County programs are currently focusing on chronically homeless people.
- It would be beneficial to explore regional planning options, including working with Portland.
- Low-barrier housing programs will be a key part of any solution.
- In the short-term, the City and County need to develop a coordinated emergency response for extreme weather, both extreme heat and extreme cold.
- The two agencies also need to work together to increase shelter capacity in the near future.

### **Councilmember Bill Turlay**

- Complimented the work that has been done by the Agency on Aging
- When discussing solutions to affordable housing and homelessness, a focus should be on how to help seniors age in place and stay in their homes or affordable apartments.
- The agencies already working on these issues need to find every opportunity to maximize the funding already being received.
- Services should be provided that ultimately are a hand-up and not just hand-out, as taxpayers will be much more supportive of such programs.
- Look for an effective and efficient plan to implement services.

### **Councilor Eileen Quiring**

- In regards to the statistics reported by agency staff, it is encouraging and pleasantly surprising that the people who are chronically homeless in Clark County are not the most prevalent.
- Complimented County staff on the coordination of the whole cadre of social services.

- Collaborate to look for best practices in other cities and regions to find the best solutions.
- There is a need in our community for rehousing and additional services and getting people housed right away.
- Observed that people who are homeless really do assemble mostly in Vancouver and urban centers.

### **Councilmember Bart Hansen**

- Complimented the County on all of the work it does surrounding social services.
- There is a need to work more closely with existing local groups to develop, coordinate and deliver services.
- Additional education on homelessness would be beneficial to the councils and the community.
- Encouraged all of the councilors and councilmembers to volunteer at the Winter Hospitality Overflow (WHO) program, and get to know people who are homeless to truly understand the people who are experiencing it and the complexity of the problem.
- Continue this discussion between the councils
- The two jurisdictions particularly need to work collaboratively on siting social service providers strategically in the city and throughout the county.

### **Councilor Jeanne Stewart**

- Regarding the annual Point in Time count of people who are homeless, which takes place in January, the councils need to accept that counting people in the dead of winter results in what is likely a significant underestimation of how many people in our community are homeless.
- Need to try to get people who are asking for mental health and substance abuse into housing immediately so these underlying issues can be seriously and most effectively addressed.
- Connecting people with resources for job training and education will also be an essential part of any long-term solution.
- Provide assistance to elderly people to scale down and move into smaller dwellings.
- In order to successfully compete for grant funds, the City and County need to be able to report and demonstrate program successes and outcomes.

### **Councilmember Anne McEnerny-Ogle**

- Encouraged every Councilor and Councilmember to volunteer to assist with the Point in Time count, volunteer at shelters and the WHO and actually meet with homeless people.
- Homeless people do not follow jurisdictional boundaries, and therefore services should be available throughout the county.
- Immediately, the City and County need to coordinate a plan to assist people who are homeless during severe weather (cold, rain and hot)
- The agencies need to look further into how to leverage additional dollars and review use of document recording fees.
- Look at available land to develop housing first locations

### **Council Chair Marc Boldt**

- Encouraged by the City and County coming together to discuss this issue.
- Struck by the number of people living at 50% of the Area Median Income (AMI) and how at risk these people are of becoming homeless if something catastrophic happened in their lives, such as losing a job.
- The primary focus should be on keeping people in their homes, but also have a conversation jointly about what a new shelter can look like and what kind of services could be included there.

### **Mayor Tim Leavitt**

- One homeless person in the community is one too many; however there will always be folks who are homeless.
- Because of the complexity of this issue and the fact that there is no silver bullet, the councils and the community still do not have a clear idea of the scope of the problem here.
- It is clear that the continuum of care to address the problem is not adequately resourced.
- It is also clear that the City of Vancouver is not in the business of delivering services for homeless people, but rather distributing funds received from other sources and incentivizing residential development to help address housing, but the City currently does not deliver homeless services; however that is a big, philosophical question facing the City Council.
- Looking for more information about where Vancouver/Clark County sits related to other communities in regards to the number of homeless people and the amount of money spent on services and housing for homeless.

- Suggested the City and County perform an evaluation of current system and determine gaps in services, the status of the 10-year homelessness plan, and the value of distributing services throughout the county.
- Continue to discuss how the community agencies can work together to secure more resources and look for further opportunities to collaborate.

### **Councilor Julie Olson**

- Pleased by the data that is being measured and reported by the County, and noted this is important when seeking other sources of funding.
- It's clear there is a need to evaluate current services in the community, including private and faith-based programs countywide, and look for cases of overlapping services.
- Moving forward, the City and County need to set collective priorities and goals.
- The City and County are serving the same population, and homelessness is not just Vancouver problem, so every opportunity to assess the broader picture will get the community closer to taking action and making real progress.

### **Councilmember Jack Burkman**

- We are currently doing a lot and there are good organizations facing a tough problem in a complex environment.
- The reality is there is decreasing purchasing power but the need is increasing, which compounds the problem.
- We are in a triage stage right now and there is a lot of opportunity for the City and County to collaborate to address the immediate needs, such as a severe weather plan.
- The discrepancy between housing costs and stymied wage increases also compounds the issue, so one of the underlying needs in preventing homelessness is providing more education, re-education and training for people.
- Need a broader conversation regarding short-term and long-term goals and tasks
- Rental costs are a huge problem, and one of the solutions may be getting more rental inventory.
- Develop a common voice for more influence at the state and federal levels
- One of the most troubling issues is the number of groups duplicating efforts. And this may be one of the first things the City and County need to address to get the right people providing the right services.

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**Reflection from facilitator on the most common themes from these observations:**

- Keep talking
  - The councils need more information
  - Make sure we focus some efforts on seniors
  - City and County plan for severe weather plan for people who are homeless
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One objective of meeting was to identify areas on which the City and County can work on together and move forward with. Some of the responses are:

**Councilmember Topper**

- Complete a full community assessment of all programs and offerings for the homeless population:
  - Include all services (private, non-profit, business, government, faith-based)
  - Jointly fund this effort
  - Look at what is out there and what is being done
  - Assess the grassroots efforts working on this issue that have not been captured in our discussions and lists of current programs

**Councilor Stewart**

- Look for the overlap in programs
- Identify all resources that are being utilized
- Provide a list of what we currently have in place
- Potentially consolidate information under the Council for Homeless umbrella and include what CFTH has already assessed.

**Councilmember Turlay**

- Develop a community task force and include representatives from the faith-based community, business, neighborhood organizations and government.

**Councilmember Hansen**

- Work together to determine location and funding for a new shelter.
- Work together to discuss the most appropriate place to locate the next multifamily tax zone.

### **Councilmember McEnery-Ogle**

- In addition to collaborating on shelters, work together to develop potential day center locations.

### **Councilmember Stober**

- A lot of what we need to do will be long-term focused, but we need to triage the immediate needs together, such as a developing a severe weather plan for people who are homeless.

### **TOPICS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION**

1. Complete a community assessment and report back to the councils on existing services, resources, overlapping programs and gaps in services
2. Involve and engage the community in whatever is done moving forward
3. Work together in siting any proposed shelters or day centers
4. Develop a severe weather plan

### **NEXT STEP**

City Manager Eric Holmes and County Administrator Mark McCauley will scope out a reasonable timeline and the resources necessary to do this work and report back for the councils' review.